University of Wisconsin Eau Claire

Department of History

"MOST BARBAROUS AND DAMNABLE TREASON":

The Gunpowder Plot and how it is viewed in the Past and Present

History 489 Research Seminar

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May 12th 2008

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 when a group of men plotted to blow up the English House of Parliament. The intended target of the event was King James VI of Scotland and I of England but also present at the time would have been the Queen, their children, members of Parliament, judges, officials and members of the clergy. The plot was discovered the night before it was to be implemented and the conspirators were either caught on site or found elsewhere within a few days. This paper will focus on how the event was viewed at the time by the citizens of England and what language they used to describe the event. This paper will also examine how people in modern times see the event as terrorism and how our views and the words we use to describe the event can be different or the same. This paper will examine primary sources including letters, trial records and sermons which will provide insight into how the event was viewed and what we can learn from this information about the plot. Secondary sources will also be used to provide background information and outline the plot.

For sheer terrorist ambition the plot remains unmatched.

-Commentator for the *Economist*

Introduction

The gunpowder plot of 1605 is an event in England's history that many people may not even be aware of. The plot was conceived by a group of Catholics who wanted to blow up King James I of England and VI of Scotland because of his Protestant faith and also his Scottish ancestry. They tried to accomplish this by putting barrels of gunpowder under Parliament with the intent to blow the powder when Parliament was in session and take the lives of all those inside the building that day. Even though it did not succeed it is an important event that could have shaken England to its very core had it been executed successfully. One author stated that if the plot had succeeded it would have "decapitated a nation by wiping out MP's, lords and the king."[1] Even in its failure it proved to be important because we can use the plot to analyze how people of the time viewed and described the event. The plot is viewed in modern terms as terrorism and we can examine the connections and differences between how the plot was viewed in the past and how it is viewed today.

This paper will discuss the modern definition of terrorism and show that the men involved with the Gunpowder plot were terrorists. It will also discuss how the events were viewed and explained at the time. The way we see events in history and the way we describe them are important to understanding the events. It is very important to look at the people of the time and their views of the events in relation to how we see that same event or events today. By

[1] "Remember, remember." *Economist*, 2005 Vol. 377 Issue 8451, 92. (This was written by a commentator for the Magazine, name of author not given.)

looking at the way the gunpowder plot was seen and described we can get a better understanding of it, its connection to terrorism and its place in history. The previous literature written on the topic did not discuss the plot in terms of terrorism. The previous literature also did not look at how the people of the time viewed the event or analyze the language used to describe it. This paper will show that these factors are important when looking at the Gunpowder Plot. This is why the paper will discuss these themes and analyze the language that will hopefully give more insight into the plot. With these ideas in mind the paper will hopefully add a different view to the previous scholarship on the Gunpowder Plot.

Chapter 1

Historiography: The Past Revisited

Literature on the topic is limited compared to other widely researched topics, but the sources that do exist offer similar interpretations of the basic facts of the plot. All of the works of literature on the Gunpowder Plot talk about who the conspirators were and why they took their course of action. The literature also mentions what the plot was, how it was discovered and the aftermath that followed this discovery. The sources then go on to inform the reader of the different features of the plot. All of the authors present their own in depth analysis of these different aspects. None of these works are recent but instead range from the early 1960's to the early 1970's. There are two exceptions to this, *What Gunpowder Plot was* by Samuel Rawson Gardiner written in 1897 and the Antonia Fraser book *Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Faith in 1605* written in 1996. The importance and relevance of each source used will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Articles about the topic began to appear more regularly in 2005, the 400th

anniversary of the event, but other articles have been appearing since the mid 1980's. These articles cover, as the books do, different aspects of the plot while discussing the basic facts of the plot.

What Gunpowder Plot was was written in 1897 by Samuel Rawson Gardiner, a highly regarded British historian. Rawson, while alive, taught at King's College in London, was a fellow at Oxford and devoted his life to studying the English Civil War. This is a valuable source because it thoroughly incorporates the primary sources and uses them to explain the event.[2] Gardiner's work and his original thoughts on the subject are quoted in two of the other secondary sources. Most authors and historians regard his work as the greatest and most complete work yet done on the Gunpowder plot.[3] This source in also important because it asks the questions: Does the plot and the way it played out make sense? Is the way that the plot was uncovered too perfect? Did everything happen the way it was reported? With many subjects there can be conspiracy theories as to what did or did not really happen. This plot is no exception and Gardiner brings up many good points surrounding the plot and what happened. He digs deeply into the story to separate fact from fiction the best he could with the sources we that are available. He gives an accurate account of what happened by using a variety of sources including testimonies and letters from the time. Gardiner then uses this evidence to see if he can come up with any solid proof that the plot did not happen the way it is portrayed in history. He is able to develop several feasible theories in regards to a possible conspiracy but ultimately is unable to prove that the facts of the event were recorded wrong. Some of these possible conspiracies include a government agent encouraging the conspirators to develop the plot and the

[2] Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *What Gunpowder Plot Was.* (New York: AMS Press, 1897), 1-16. What Gunpowder Plot Was is the actual title, not What the Gunpowder Plot Was, although the first sounds grammatically incorrect.
[3] C.R.N. Routh, ed. *They saw it happen: An Anthology of Eye-Witnesses' Accounts of Events in British History 1485-1688* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1956), 113.

possibility that the plot was hoax perpetrated by the government to discredit Catholics and make villains out of them. Gardiner ultimately explains that it is highly unlikely that any of conspiracy theories were true. [4]

Another work looked at is the *Gunpowder Treason and Plot* (1976) by C. Northcote Parkinson. Parkinson is a British historian and a critically acclaimed author. Parkinson received his Ph.D. from Kings College and has taught in Universities around the world.[5] *Gunpowder Treason and Plot* is an important source because it is very detailed and takes apart the different aspects of the plot so they are easy to understand. Also important in this work is the close attention paid to the celebration that exists even today, Guy Fawkes Day, which celebrates the foiling of the plot. Parkinson explains that the anniversary became a celebration just like the foiled Gowrie plot had been before. The Gowrie plot, which happened early in the reign of King James, was a plot by Catholic conspirators to kill King James. The plot was foiled without any injury to the King and was celebrated after by the government and population as a victory over the enemies of the state. Parkinson also adds some interesting facts that have to do with the plot but that are really not that important to it. The drawings, paintings and cartoons that exist about the plot are also included in his work and the author then discusses what these items are and why they are important.[6]

Intended Treason (1970) by Paul Durst is an interesting and informative source because of the detail it goes into about how the plot was stopped. He references the letter that was

[4] Gardiner, *What Gunpowder Plot Was,* 14-16.
[5] "Parkinson, C. Northcote." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2008. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 2 May 2008 <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9058517>.
[6] C. Northcote Parkinson, *Gunpowder Treason and Plot.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 116-117.

supposedly given to Lord Mounteagle.[7] The letter was from one of the conspirators, who called himself a friend of Lord Mounteagle and warned Mounteagle that something was going to happen at Parliament and that he and his friends should stay away.[8] Durst mentions that it is amazing that Lord Mounteagle would take the note seriously. An anonymous letter, sent in the dead of the night which was poorly written and ambiguous was not the most trustworthy source of information. It is also astonishing to Durst that Mounteagle would then ride immediately to pass the letter on to those in the government who could possibly figure out what the note was referring to. The note was confusing and vague so if it was taken seriously it would need to be examined by others to determine what kind of threat it was. The author does an excellent job of asking what primary sources are reliable and how reliable they actually are. He also does an in depth study of Robert Catesby, one of the conspirators, who apparently was the most levelheaded of the group. Catesby held the group together every time one of the conspirators panicked. Durst pays close attention to how Catesby organized the plot and how he handled finding out that the letter had been sent to Lord Mounteagle. Durst, more than any other author, focuses mostly on Catesby instead of focusing on the other conspirators because he is the anchor of the whole plot.[9]

The Durst book also has an entire chapter called "The Scapegoat".[10] When reading this chapter one would assume it would be a discussion about Guy Fawkes but that proves not to be the case. Fawkes is the conspirator best known in connection with the plot mainly because he was the only one caught on site under the Parliament building with the gunpowder. It does not

[7] The spelling of the name (Mounteagle, Monteagle) varies from source to source and will follow the specific source used accordingly. Other names throughout the work vary in spelling and will also be followed on a source to source basis but will be easily recognizable.
[8] Paul Durst, *Intended Treason* (South Brunswick; New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1970), 94.
[9] Ibid, 40-48, 50-56, 68-74.
[10] Ibid, 256-280.

however give an explanation of why Fawkes was most remembered but instead talks about a Priest named Garnet. Father Garnet took the fall as the instigator of the plot. The author mentions that Garnet did not seem to have anything to do with the plot other than he had in the past supposedly encouraged Robert Catesby to conspire against the Protestant government.[11] He did however have suspicions that were confirmed when, in confession; Robert Catesby told him all the details of the plot. Garnet was shocked to learn about the plot but was powerless to do anything about it because learned about it through the "binding seal of confession."[12] This chapter is also excellent because it provides information on the search for people directly or indirectly involved with the plot. The author again asks engaging questions when it comes to the discrepancies that occur when different sources mention different conspirators. Durst makes the excellent point that many people, even those of the middle class, had servants in that time period. From this we can conclude that more people may have been involved in the plot than first thought. Servants of the conspirators may have been carrying letters back and forth or scheduling meetings that they may or may not have known the true purpose behind.[13]

The Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Faith in 1605 by Antonia Fraser is a work of historical fiction.[14] It mixes the facts of the Gunpowder Plot with sensationalism fiction. The work is very interesting and may get the general public more interested in history than would the regular "dry" works of history. In the historical field however, *The Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Faith in 1605* is best utilized by looking at the author's bibliography and footnotes.[15] Fraser includes an impressive list of sources, both primary and secondary, that can be used as a foundation for a

[11] By conspiring Garnet meant to continue practicing their faith in secret, working to gain help at home and abroad to persuade the King to change the religion back to Catholicism and the like. He did not mean to try to overthrow the government to kill the king.
[12] Durst, *Intended Treason,* 68.
[13] Ibid, 61-63.
[14] Antonia Fraser, *The Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Faith in 1605* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996).
[15] Ibid, 296-329.

research paper on the Gunpowder Plot.[16] All of these books, while excellent sources on the plot, do not look at the plot as terrorism or look into the language used to express how the people of the time saw the event. Not one of the books mentions the word terrorism.

Articles about the plot began to circulate with more regularity around the 400th anniversary. Out of these articles only a few mention the plot as an act of terrorism and none look at how the event was viewed. "Reading the Plot Forward" by Richard Byrne discusses the similarities of the plot with other events throughout history. The article also, for the first time in my research, makes a clear connection between the plot and terrorism.[17] There is no doubt in the mind of the author that the Gunpowder Plot was an act of terrorism and it can subsequently be compared with other terrorist acts throughout history. Also mentioned in this article is the idea that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* may have been written with the plot in mind.[18] Many historians accept this argument or at least recognize that it is feasible. If *Macbeth* is truly based on the plot then it gives the Gunpowder Plot even more significance in history. If Shakespeare found the plot interesting or important enough to base his play or parts of it on the plot then it is likely that people at the time were very aware of it. If true it also shows us how Shakespeare viewed the plot.

"Remember, Remember" is an article that outlines the plot and the impact it would have had on England and the world if it had succeeded. It also takes a look at why people still talk about the plot today and why it is celebrated 400 years later, every November 5th as Guy Fawkes

[16] For the purpose of this paper and other historical works this book is used only for a bibliography of Primary sources you find that the author Fraser used. It is included in my historiography because of the excellent Primary source list given and to show the other types of works written about the Gunpowder Plot.
[17] Richard Byrne, "Reading the Plot Forward", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52(December, 2005): A12.
[18] Ibid, A12.

Day but does not go into much detail.[19] It is important to understand that Guy Fawkes Day is not celebrated in memory of hero as one might think because of the name of the holiday. It is instead celebrated as the day the treasonous and horrible plot was foiled. The memory of Fawkes then is not celebrated but instead vilified with the burning of effigies in his image.[20]

"The Gunpowder Plot" is an article written in 2005 by Simon Adams, the author of over sixty works of literature. The article discusses what motivated these men to plan and try to carry out the plot. Tensions existed between the Catholics and Protestants in England since the Protestant Reformation in the 1530's. King Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church and made the State Religion of England Protestantism. In the years that followed this decision various people and factions disputed the claims of both religions. The monarchy further fueled conflict by subjecting their population to an ever shifting state religion.[21] Compared to other rulers in Europe and rulers in England's past, King James' religious policies were relatively tolerant. Add to that the loose enforcement of those policies and laws that might offend Catholics, the author questions why the conspirators would go to such extremes to kill King James.[22]

While Catholicism was the not state religion, a fact that would have irritated the Catholic conspirators, it is a stretch to kill the king because of that fact alone. Adams suggests that it would have made a lot more sense to plot to kill him if he had been a tyrant or had put in place

[19] "Remember, remember." *Economist* 377(2005): 92. (This was written by a commentator for the Magazine, name of author not given.) This source is best used as an example of writing on the 400th anniversary as well as for the quotes that were used above in the work.
[20] Ibid, 93.
[21] Simon Adams, "The Gunpowder Plot", *History Today* 55(2005):10-12.
[22] The religious turmoil that existed in England from the time of Henry VIII and the Reformation up until James I & VI will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

rigid laws against Catholics.[23] The author questions the motives of the plot but also points out some frustrations the men may have felt as Catholics living in a Protestant kingdom. Included in these frustrations might be the fact that Catholic Priests had been asked to leave England just months before the plot was conceived.[24] The fact that the conspirator's honored and revered spiritual guides were asked to leave England may have angered the conspirators. These articles, along with the other literature about the plot, provide various viewpoints and ideas mixed together with the factual information about the plot.

Chapter 2

England: Its History and Rulers

Before launching into a discussion of the Gunpowder Plot, the views of it and its connection to terrorism it is important to understand England at the time. It is also important to understand the rulers who had so much influence at the time, from King Henry VIII to King James I & VI and the background of the Gunpowder plot itself. In the years leading up to the reign of King James I & VI England was a hotbed of activities that had an overwhelming effect on its own history and subsequently the history of the world. Henry VIII was the great-uncle of King James I & VI and was instrumental in changing England's history and shaping the country that James would rule over ninety-six years later. The Protestant Reformation that Henry VIII brought about would forever change England and much of the world.

[23] Adams, "The Gunpowder Plot", 10-12.
[24] Ibid, 10-12.

King Henry, King Edward and the Nine days Queen Jane

Henry VIII, who is best known for having many wives and disposing of a few, should more importantly be known as the man responsible for reshaping the Church of England.[25] King Henry decided to embrace the Protestant religion and turn his back on the supreme Catholic Church. Even for the right reasons, true belief in the new Protestant religion, this would have caused uproar throughout Europe and England. Since it was over something as trivial as wanting to divorce his wife to marry another woman it caused even more uproar. The attempt to swap religions aroused not only the anger of the Pope who is the head of the Catholic faith, but also King Phillip of Spain whose aunt Henry was divorcing. Not to mention the many people of England who still wanted to be Catholic.[26] So began the upheaval of religious authority that would plague England for the next eleven years and in many ways for hundreds of years to come.

After Henry, came his son Edward VI who became king at just ten years old. Edward was a sickly child and only lived for six years after becoming king.[27] Instead of the hoped for stability[28] that a legitimate and long living male heir could have provided, England received a king dead before he could strengthen and consolidate his power. What followed his death was a power struggle for who would rule and for what religion they would mandate in England.

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[25] Fanny Blake, *Kings and Queens of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2003), 64. There is a wide selection of literature specifically about King Henry VIII, his wives and the Protestant Reformation. For the purpose of this paper, since those subjects were not the focus, general history books and books about my topic that referenced these subjects were used.

[26] Ibid, 64-65.

[27] Ibid, 66.

[28] Henry VIII spent his entire life hoping for a son and went through many wives to get one. His father King Henry VII and his mother Elizabeth of York had been married to end the War of the Roses. This war had been fought over the succession to the English throne between the Houses of York and Lancaster. Both houses had rights to the throne and the marriage ended this issue. Henry VIII feared that if he did not have a son to secure succession he would undo his father's work and England would again be thrown into war over who had the right to the throne. When Henry's son Edward was born he thought his prayers had been answered but Edward was an unhealthy child and died young. This as King Henry had feared, threw England into a succession dispute.

Henry's two other children, both older than Edward, had been passed over because they were female and because they had been bastardized by the annulments their father received to marry his next wives.

Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, was the oldest of the children and devoutly Catholic. If Mary became queen she would throw England back into religious discord as she would put into effect again Catholicism as the state religion. She was however the oldest of King Henry VIII's children and the succession order needed to be followed. It was not followed though because Edward named his cousin Jane Grey his successor. The Duke of Northumberland, who was the Lord Protector[29], supports this decision and marries Jane to his son to strengthen his power and authority in England. Jane was not a bad candidate to be Queen because she was Protestant, unlike Mary, and because she was a legitimate child, unlike both Mary and Elizabeth. Unfortunately for Jane, who most saw as an innocent pawn, she had little just right to the throne and within nine days had been imprisoned in the Tower of London with her husband. Her new father-in-law, the Duke of Northumberland, was executed within a month and a year later Jane shared his fate.[30]

[29] Lord Protector is a title given to a member of the nobility who acts as a councilor for a king who is not yet old enough to rule by himself. They have tremendous amounts of influence on minors and have large amounts of power in the kingdom.
[30] Blake*, Kings and Queens,* 68.

Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth

In an ironic twist of fate for Henry VIII his two illegitimate[31] daughters, who he may or may not have cared for, were thrust from being bastards to being two consecutive queens of England. Mary was a Catholic who took her faith extremely seriously and unfortunately for the people of England fanatically as well. The woman who would be known as "Bloody Mary" spent most of her reign burning heretics and trying to stamp out the Protestant religion and the Protestant population of England. When Mary I died her younger sister Elizabeth took the throne and gave England the stability that it had been lacking even in the days of Henry VIII. Queen Elizabeth I was a very important figure in England's history for many reasons. She ruled alone, without male consort, and was a powerful and long ruling queen. As King James would after her, Elizabeth had many assassination attempts made on her life. Most of these attempts were made either by Catholic subjects or Catholics sent by foreign powers.[32]

The most notable was the Babington plot which took place in 1586 and implicated Mary Queen of Scots who was cousin to Queen Elizabeth and mother to the future King James. This plot, and its discovery, left Queen Elizabeth with only one terrible choice for how to deal with her cousin. Mary had already caused tensions with her cousin Elizabeth because of her claim to the English throne as well as her Catholic faith and Elizabeth had no choice but to execute Mary for the attempt she had made on Elizabeth's life. Elizabeth was very tolerant of Catholicism and many Protestants thought more so than she should have been. There was however still tensions

[31] Mary was made illegitimate when Henry VIII had his marriage to Catherine of Aragon dissolved, arguing it was not a legal union because Catherine had first been his brother Arthur's wife. Henry also cited the fact that he now followed the Protestant and not the Catholic Church. Elizabeth became illegitimate when her father Henry VIII had his marriage to Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth's mother, dissolved after he convicted Anne of treason for adultery and other alleged crimes. Anne was beheaded for the "crimes" that she most likely did not commit. Her real "crime" was in not providing Henry with a male heir.

[32] Blake, *Kings and Queens,* 69-73.

between the two religions that had existed from the time her father had broken away from the Catholic Church and made the state religion of England Protestantism. Elizabeth allowed Catholic masses to be said and did not persecute those of the Catholic faith like her sister Mary had done with those of the Protestant faith.[33] These concessions were not enough for many Catholics during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I and VI. Many would do whatever it took until the King or Queen of England was a Catholic once again.

Chapter 3

The Plot unfolds

This was the England that James I of England and VI stepped into. It was a country torn by years of religious struggles between the Catholics and the Protestants and stained by the blood of many including his own mother. It was certainly not an easy job for him to step into and because of his Scottish ancestry and his Protestant faith; he was a target for many plots that included the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. James and his policies towards the Catholics were also fairly lenient. His wife was a Catholic, and many believed it would not take much persuasion for King James to convert. Whether he was ever actually considering becoming a Catholic or not he remained a Protestant and thereby became the opponent of many and the enemy of some who were willing to take the hatred they felt to a more physical and shocking level.[34]

There were two plots early in his reign in 1603.[35] Both conspiracies were quickly discovered and foiled before they were really even a threat. The next major plot was less than a

[33] Ibid, 73-74.
[34] Maurice Lee Jr., *Great Britain's Solomon: James VI and I in his three Kingdoms.* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 113-114.
[35] Ibid, 108.

year later and would gain far more attention than the previous plots had.[36] It would have most likely succeeded had one of the conspirators not given advance warning to Lord Mounteagle, a friend and stopped what would become known even in the days shortly afterward as the Gunpowder Plot.

The Gunpowder Plot took place, or would have if it had succeeded, on November 5, 1605. On December 11, 1604 the conspirators began to dig a hole in the basement of a building next to Parliament in hopes of having access to its basement. Two months later what the men found was that it was far harder than they had imagined and started to give up hope on that part of the plot when, by what they could have seen as divine intervention, the cellar of Parliament itself had come up for rent. They rented the cellar, placed thirty-six barrels of gunpowder in it and there it remained under the supervision of Guy Fawkes until the night of November 4. Parliament was set to open the next day and the men planned to blow the powder once King James, his family and the members of Parliament took their places.[37] What was to occur on November 5 would have been an enormous tragedy for the royal family and England itself. While most plots were aimed at the King alone this would have potentially killed hundreds of people and would have wiped out much of England's aristocracy.

Sometime before the plot took place however a letter from Francis Tresham, one of the conspirators, arrived at the home of Lord Mounteagle warning him and his Catholic friends to stay away from Parliament on November 5.[38] He forwarded the letter to higher authorities and action was taken to discover the meaning behind the letter. On the night of the 4th Guy Fawkes

[36]Gardiner, *What Gunpowder plot was*, 14.
[37]Ibid, 14-16.
[38] Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *What Gunpowder Plot was* (New York: AMS Press, 1897; 1969), 114. The date the letter was received by Mounteagle is questioned. Some sources list the date as October 26th and others date the letter November the 4th (the night before the plot was to have happened).

was caught in the basement of Parliament, and because men had been alerted to the possibility of danger he was detained. The men searched the room, discovered the gunpowder and promptly arrested Fawkes.[39]

Fawkes was just one of the many, real and imagined, conspirators involved in the plot. Also involved were Robert Winter, Thomas Winter, John Grant, Ambrose Rookwood, Robert Keyes, Thomas Bates, Robert Catesby, Francis Tresham, Christopher Wright, John Wright, Thomas Percy and Sir Edward Digby.[40] All of the men were gentlemen of at least modest means and many had ties to the aristocracy of England.[41] Many others were implicated, including servants of many of the implicated and of the above mentioned men. It became paranoia and anyone and everyone could be involved with the plot. This line of thinking did stop quickly however and the real conspirators were revealed. Father Garnet, a Jesuit leader, was condemned as the mastermind of the plot although he did not participate in it.[42] Fawkes was interrogated and confessed but refused to reveal that anyone else was involved in the plot. He underwent five examinations before being tortured on November 9th.[43] Fawkes, while he did give up all the

[39] Philip Sidney, *A History of the Gunpowder Plot: The Conspiracy and its Agents* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1974), 81.

[40] *A True and perfect relation of the proceedings against the late most barbarous traitors, Garnet a Iesuite, and his confederats contayning sundry speeches deliuered by the Lords Commissioners at their arraignments for the better satisfaction of those who were hearers, as occasion was offered: the Earle of Northamptons speech having been enlarged upon grounds which are set down: and lastly all that passes at Garnets execution.,* Imprinted at London, Robert Barker, printer to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, 1606, 4-7. Early English Books Online, copy from British Library.

[41] They came from "good" families. Loosely translating this, in England there was the royalty then the aristocracy then the "good" families, usually second sons of the aristocracy and their descendents. There was then a "middle class" (although not like we think of today), then the shopkeepers and farmers who made up a "lower middle class", the lower class and then the very poor.

[42] At most he perhaps put a similar idea in their head and the conspirators decided the details and carried out the plot. Still, some have suggested that he knew that a plot of some sort was in the works without ever knowing what the plot actually was. On the other hand some authors suggest that he knew everything.

[43] Gardiner, *What Gunpowder plot was,* 17.

details of the plot never gave up his co-conspirators and was executed a few days later.[44] The rest of the plotters either let information slip, turned on one another or acted suspicious enough to draw attention to themselves.

When the news reached the rest of the conspirators that Fawkes had been arrested they fled to Dunchurch in Warwickshire, met with their supporters and then fled to Holbeach House in Worchester.[45] There the local Sheriff and some local residents confront the conspirators and in the ensuing scuffle four of the conspirators are killed. The other members are arrested on put on trial on January 27th 1606. On the 30th and 31st of January the men were marched to the scaffold and we executed. Father Garnet shared their fate four months later when he was executed at the Tower of London.[46] The plot proved fatal for the members involved, including Father Garnet who swore even at his execution that he had never been part of the plot.

Chapter 4

Language and Views of the Gunpowder Plot

It is extremely important in understanding an event to examine how people saw the event and the language used to describe it. Unfortunately, for the Gunpowder Plot we have only primary source accounts from the nobility including King James VI & I. This leaves out much of the population and how they saw the event. Even without these missing sources we can with the sources we do have get a good idea of how people saw the event. The primary sources we have include: a letter from King James I of England to his brother-in-law King Christian of

[44] Ibid, 42. It was put out in documents that Fawkes gave up his fellow conspirators but there is no evidence to support that and few contemporary authors believe that he gave anyone up.
[45] Simon Adams, "The Gunpowder Plot", *History Today,* 55 no. 11 (November, 2005):16-17.
[46] Parkinson, *Gunpowder Treason and Plot*, 86-114.

Denmark, a letter from King James to his privy council, a letter from the Earl of Salisbury to Sir Charles Cornwallis, a letter from Sir Edward Hoby to Sir Thomas Edmondes, a letter allegedly from one of the conspirators to Lord Monteagle, a sermon written about the plot and the proceedings from the trial of the conspirators. Looking at these sources helps historians to examine how people, even if it is only a select group, see the event. We can do this by examining the language the people use to describe it. Looking at how people see the event can help us understand the event, the people who saw the event and the time period.

Potential Victims

The most important person to look at when viewing how people saw and described the event is King James VI and I. After all, the plot was directed at him and he would have suffered the most from the attack. The letters we have from King James are two very different sources. One is both a personal letter as well as a letter of state. This is the letter from King James to his brother-in-law Christian IV of Denmark. This letter is not only written from one brother-in-law to another but also from one Protestant king to another. It shows not just James as king but also as a person who very nearly lost his life and how he feels about the events and how he is dealing with it.[47] King James started the letter with greetings and a few sentences filled with immaterial things including the "goodwill between them."[48] From there he recalled plots that both of them had dealt with in the past. James then talked about the plot, how he felt about it and how he thought it was stopped.

[47]King James I of England and VI of Scotland to King Christian of Denmark, 11 November 1605, in *Letters of King James* ed. G.P.V. Akrigg, (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 276.
[48] Ibid, 276.

King James referred to the plot with many different words including: atrocious, horrid, detestable, treason and crime.[49] While reading his letter you get the sense that he is trying to remain somewhat coolly detached from the whole proceedings. We cannot unfortunately know the mood James was in when he wrote the letter but by examining the words he uses to describe the event we can get an idea of how he felt about the plot. James used the phrase "the most horrid and detestable of all treasons" to describe the plot.[50] To James treason was the worst thing a person could possibly do and this event to him was even worse than treason. The word treason according to the Oxford Dictionary is an "act of betraying, betrayal of trust, or a breach of faith" and showed up in the English language as early as 1225.[51] King James saw this event not just as an attempt on his life but also as a betrayal of the trust and faith that he shared with his subjects. He also used the word atrocious to describe the plot meaning "excessively cruel, savage and extremely violent."[52] This is an act so horrible to King James that it takes him all of the words to describe bad things that exist at the time to explain it.

There are no real surprises in the feelings that James would have or in his use of words that describe the event as horrible. As noted previously this plot had it succeeded would have caused so many deaths and so much destruction. The fact that the conspirators knew many people would be in attendance and that those people had little to do with the government and nothing to do with the government's policies makes the crime truly atrocious in the mind of James. James also mentions how the people of England felt about the crime saying that the

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[49] Ibid, 276-77.
[50] *Letters of King James*, 276.
[51] Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "Treason." http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.uwec.edu/cgi/entry/50256931?query_type=word&queryword=treason&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=0fMj-CWf0kT-13563&hilite=50256931 (accessed 27 March 2008).
[52] Ibid, "Atrocious." http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.uwec.edu/cgi/entry/50014288?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=atrocious&first=1&max_to_show=10. (accessed 28 March 2008).

people without being asked took up arms and helped to bring the guilty into custody.[53] Obviously the letter of King James is biased in the way he accounts facts because he is angry. In this case however it seems like most people agreed that the plot was shocking and evil. It was one thing to dislike your king or even be happy when he died but it was quite another for someone to take the life of the King. In addition to the death of the king, there would have also been the deaths of so many other people including the Queen[54] and the Prince. It is not surprising that many people would have been shocked and outraged at the death of so many innocent people.

Besides describing the event James also recalled how the plot was discovered and who he attributes that to. James is quite clear when he states that the plot was discovered and foiled by the grace of God. He also attributes his subjects helping out to God as well. James states that God has shown "divine kindness and clemency" in the past and that all past help is not nearly as "notable or marvelous" than God's foiling of the plot.[55] It was not uncommon in this time period or even in modern times for people to attribute events or the stopping of events to the "Vengeance" of God or the "Grace" of God as is shown throughout the letters about the plot explaining the God stopped the plot.

The other letter we have from King James is his letter to the Privy Council outlining the questions to ask "John Johnson" or Guy Fawkes while he was being interrogated.[56] This is an interesting letter because it shows how curious James was about who Fawkes was, who he was

[53] *Letters of King James*, 276.
[54] This is particularly ironic considering the fact that the Queen was a Catholic and often tried to convince her husband to convert. There are some reports that the Queen may have died a Protestant but it far more likely that she was raised a Protestant in Denmark, converted to Catholicism and remained Catholic until her death.
[55] *Letters of King James*, 276-277.
[56] King James I of England and VI of Scotland to Privy Council, 6 November 1605 in *Letters of King James*, ed. G.P.V. Akrigg, (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 273. Guy Fawkes gave the name John Johnson when he was arrested and that is the name they knew him by during the interrogation process.

involved with, why he did what he did and how he was able to accomplish setting up the plot.[57] From the questions King James put on the list it seems as if he tried to understand the man and why he did what he did, not just figure out whom else was involved in the plot. After the list of questions meant for Fawkes, King James also included a note that explained his thoughts on who was the "leader" behind the attack. James thought that this plot must be the work of a "priest or fugitive abroad" and this is not surprising considering there were constant threats from Catholic powers abroad.[58] The death of King James and the possibility that he would be replaced with a Catholic monarch might tempt many foreign Catholic rulers to become involved with plots to kill Protestant rulers that they saw as unfit to rule. The letter ends with James telling the Privy Council if they are unable to get information out of Fawkes with just the questions or light torture they should then employ "Et sic per gradus ad ima tenditur" or "and so by degrees until the ultimate is reached".[59]

By any means necessary is basically what James said in his letter to the Privy Council and few at the time would have condemned him for it. These men had after all very nearly killed him, his family and many of his closest associates and friends. In the letters of King James we are able to get a glimpse of how he saw the event and how he described it. His letters show one side of the story, the side of the potential victim, and show the reader his personal thought on the plot and how he described it. King James was angry and rightly so because the act was not just against him as a person but also him as the sovereign King of England and head of the Church of England. King James not just head of the state, he was the state and these men threatened to destroy this.

[57] Ibid, 274.
[58] Ibid, 274.
[59] *Letters of King James*, 275.

Another primary source letter about the event that we have is from the Earl of Salisbury to Sir Charles Cornwallis. In this letter we see, as we did in the letter from King James to King Christian, thanks being given to God that the plot was stopped. Salisbury actually said in the very beginning of the first sentence "It hath pleased the Almighty God out of his singular Goodness, to bring to light the most cruel and detestable Conspiracy against the person of his Majestie and the whole State of this Realme that ever was conceived by the Hart of Man, at any time or in any Place whatsoever."[60] This sentence conveys very well how the author, the Earl of Salisbury, felt about the event and how it was stopped. Again, as with the letter of King James to King Christian, God stopped the event because it was wrong and those who perpetrated it were horrible people who deserved to be caught. Salisbury mentioned that the plot was stopped because of the grace that the King deserved and as "just revenge against" those who should be punished for their treasonable plot.[61]

The letter also outlined what the plot was and how it was to be carried out, who was involved and how it was foiled. The account seems to almost identical to the other sources, both primary and secondary. The Earl of Salisbury is the man that Lord Mounteagle brought the letter from the conspirators to when he received it and would have been in Parliament on November 5th.[62] The fact that he would have been present puts him close to the plot, although not as close as the King, and again gives us insight on a person who would have died that day had the plot not been discovered. The Earl discussed how he was not sure if the letter was a joke or if it was serious but he said he was "loath to trust my owne Judgement alone, and being alwaies inclined

[60] Earl of Salisbury to Sir Charles Cornwallis, 9 November 1605, in *James I by his contemporaries,* ed. Robert Ashton (London: Hutchinson & CO LTD, 1969), 192. Throughout the paper and in the Bibliography when quoting from primary sources I have used the exact spelling, punctuation and capitalization which will be in conflict several times with more modern standards for grammar and syntax.
[61] *James I by his Contemporaries*, 193.
[62] Ibid, 193. Warning letter previously discussed in Note 3 on p 5.

to do too much in such a Case as this is, I imparted the Letter to the Earl of Suffolk, Lord Chamberlain, to the end I might receive his Opinion."[63] He was right to take the letter to him because the Earl of Suffolk and he correctly theorized that the meeting of Parliament would a perfect time to cause such destruction as well as the fact that the gunpowder would make the "great blowe" mentioned in the letter.[64] Now all that was left was for them to figure out how the men would accomplish the job. It was Suffolk who recalled that there was a great vault and some other rooms under Parliament that were empty except for some "Wood and Cole" and that this would be a possible location to carry out the plan.[65]

While reading the letter Salisbury seemed, like King James, to be slightly detached from the event. Neither man mentions in their letters that they could have easily died, or that they were frightened. This may be false bravado or not wanting to share their true feelings for fear of being thought less of. It may also be because they never feared too much for their lives in the first place. It is entirely possible that, while they were upset, they could not even really feel the fear because the event had not passed and was such an unthinkable event. What we do know from the two personal letters is that God plays an important part according to the men in the foiling of the plot. The letters also show us how this plot, unlike many plots before it, was planned so well and so far in advance. It came too close to actually happening that people were shocked by it and its terrible nature.

The final letter is from Sir Edward Hoby, a gentleman of the bedchamber[66] to Sir Thomas Edmondes, the English Ambassador in Brussels. Sir Edward was very likely present at the

[63] Ibid, 194.
[64] *James I by his Contemporaries*, 194.
[65] Ibid, 194.
[66] A gentleman of the bedchamber was usually a Nobleman who was generally very powerful and important. This was an important position because you would have close access to the King. Duties could include dining privately

examination of Fawkes, which took place on November the 5th, and sent the letter to Sir Thomas on the 19th of November. Sir Edward started the letter by informing Sir Thomas that on the 5th he attended the meeting of Parliament and reports that the King was not in attendance. He then went on to explain the reason behind the Kings absence. He giave the same basic story of the plot that the other people writing about the plot. Sir Edward gave an account of what happened more than commenting on how he saw the event but did call the plot "foul and a heinous treason".[67] Sir Edward is shocked by the plot, as most were, because the conspirators were setting up England for a disaster that was unthinkable. There would have been chaos if the plot had succeeded with the deals of so many leading men in the government.

The Conspirators

Now we turn our attention in a different direction and look at what little information we have from the conspirators. On October 26 Lord Mounteagle received a letter that allegedly written by Francis Tresham to warn Mounteagle that he and his Catholic friends should not be in Parliament on November 5 1605.[68] This letter of course was important in discovering and stopping the plot and gives us a glimpse at Francis Tresham, one of the conspirators. Not only is the letter important because it tells us about one of the conspirators but it is also important because it shows us how Lord Mounteagle saw the event and how he responded to it. The letter that Lord Mounteagle recieved is as follows:

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with the King, helping him to dress or being part of private or personal meetings or discussions. Members of the Royal Bedchamber were generally close friends and advisors of the King or became so after holding the position.

[67] Sir Edward Hoby to Sir Thomas Edmondes 17 November 1605 in *They saw it happen: An Anthology of Eye-Witnesses' Accounts of Events in British History 1485-1688,* C.R.N. Routh, ed., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1956),114-115.

[68] Gardiner, *What Gunpowder Plot was*, 114.

> my lord out of the loue i beare to some of youer frends i haue a caer of youer preseruacion therfor i would aduyse yowe as yowe tender youer lyf to deuys some excuse to shift of yourer attendance at this parleament for god and man hath concurred to punishe the wickedness of this tyme and thinke not slighlye of this aduertisment but retyere youre self into youre country wheare yowe maye expect the euent in safti for thowghe theare be no apparance of anni stir yet i saye they shall receyue a terrible blowe this parleament and yet they shall not seie who hurts them this councel is not to be contemned because it may do yowe good and can do yowe no harm for the danger is passes as soon as yowe haue burnt the letter and i hope god will give yowe the grace to mak good use of it to whose holy proteccion i commend yowe. To the right honorable the lord mowteagle.[69]

While the letter is not obvious about what exactly is going to happen you can see parts of the letter that would give some cause for alarm and indicate that something horrible was going to happen. At the very least it should be checked out. Whether it was that night, or the next day, Lord Mounteagle passed on the letter to the Earl of Salisbury who then passed it on to the Earl of Suffolk. Both men then investigated the letter and alerted King James to the threat.[70] The government took precautions and they searched for what the "terrible blowe" that was going to be dealt to Parliament.[71]

When looking at the language Tresham uses we can see that he feels the conspirators, along with God, will be punishing the wickedness of the men they are going to blow up.[72] Tresham seemed to think that he was being incredibly accommodating and expected Lord Mounteagle to tell those of his Catholic friends he wanted to save and then burn the letter. He really is being accommodating considering he could have let them all die without giving a warning. Mounteagle instead of being thankful for the warning is horrified that a plot is afoot against the King and the State and goes to seek help. Mounteagle may be an isolated case of how a member of the nobility would react to the plot but it is far more likely that this is the way most

[69] Francis Tresham to Lord Mounteagle 26 October 1605 in *They saw it happen: An Anthology of Eye-Witnesses' Accounts of Events in British History 1485-1688,* C.R.N. Routh, ed., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1956), 114.
[70] *James I by his contemporaries*, 194.
[71] Ibid, 195.
[72] Tresham, *Letter to Lord Mounteagle,* 114.

people would react upon discovering the plot. If this is the way Mounteagle reacted to the letter he must have been horrified when he learned of the actual plot and what it was meant to do.[73]

Plot in the Public

After looking at more personal sources we shift to the aspects of the plot that the public was made aware of. There are records from the trial that show how the case was handled in court. There were also many sermons written throughout the years following the plot about how the plot and the conspirators were viewed. Most of the sermons are from years later and are given on the anniversary of the plot and do not reflect the time that the actual plot took place. The sermon examined in this paper was written just a few days after and can more accurately than those that came later capture the thoughts on the plot at the time it occurred.

The Sermon discussed is preached right after the plot was discovered. The sermon is of course biased because the Protestant Church is so involved in events at the time. The sermon was written from the Protestant point of view, which was the state religion at the time, and with out a doubt reflects the Anti-Catholic feelings of the Protestant church at the time. The sermon was preached by the right Reverend Father in God William Barlow, Bishop of Rochester and was most likely written by William Barlow himself. It was delivered in a church service shortly after the plot was discovered. The sermon actually starts by declaring that the sermon was not

[73] Ibid, 114.

set up by the government and that he was not appointed to write it.[74] (More on this sermon, the other Sermon and the Trial records later)

The trial records are also very important to look at for a number of reasons. We are able to look at and analyze the testimony of those conspirators involved and how the trial was conducted. Next we are able to look at how those who were running the trial viewed the conspirators and the proceedings. Finally we are able to get the legal interpretation of the plot and the words used to describe this as a crime according to the law, not just how individual people saw it. We can look at the language used to describe the crime these men committed and on what charges they will be tried. One thing that is very clear from the trial records it the terminology used to describe the event and what that terminology meant to people at the time. The word used the most in the trial records is treason and it is clear from reading the records that there is no worse word used to describe a crime than treason.

The word Treason appears over one hundred times throughout the trial record and often appears several times on the same page.

[74] William Barlow, The Bishop of Rochester. *The Sermon preached at Paules Crosse, the tenth of November, being the next Sunday after the discoverie of this late and horrible treason.* (London: Printed for Mathew Lawe, 1605), 2.

Chapter 5

The Gunpowder Plot: Terrorism

After looking at how the plot was viewed and described in the past we can now turn our attention to the views of the present. Trying to define the Gunpowder plot is certainly no easy feat. It would have been murder and treason but would it have been terrorism as we understand it today? Terrorism is a difficult concept to define and can produce definitions that people seldom agree on. It is not impossible to define terrorism however. One author argues that to say terrorism can not be defined "is simply taking the easy way out."[75] Hard as it may be to define, researchers need to take the time to carefully analyze information on terrorism and ultimately define it. The definition of terrorism changes over time or more accurately transforms to suit the ever changing world and the way we see it. The word terrorism did not exist at the time of the Gunpowder Plot and if fact did not exist until the late 1700's. The word was first coined in 1789 to speak of the French Revolution and the terror that occurred there.[76] The first usage is newer than one might think but still predates the Gunpowder Plot.

Looking at the evolving definition of terrorism in the United States, which is only one example of course, we see a shift from broad definitions to more narrow ones. In 1980 a standard American dictionary defined terrorism as follows: "The use of force or threats to demoralize, intimidate, and subjugate, esp., such use as a political weapon or policy." This definition is broad and predates many of the recent terrorist attacks that have taken place in the

[75] Terrell E. Arnold and Moorhead Kennedy, *Terrorism: The New Warfare* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 1988), 7.
[76] Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. "Terrorism." http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.uwec.edu/cgi/entry/50249598?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=terrorism&first=1&max_to_show=10 (accessed 6 May 2008).

U.S. like the 9/11 attacks and the Oklahoma City bombing.[77] Another definition of terrorism is "The deliberate military targeting of civilians as a method of affecting the political behavior of nations and leaders."[78] This definition in contrast to the first is very narrow and would not include many terrorist acts including those not aimed at civilians.

Other important definitions of terrorism to look at are those of a government. By doing this we are able to see how governments, in this case the United States government, view terrorism. An earlier definition of terrorism that the government used under the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations was "The unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives (28 C.F.R.)."[79] By 1983 the State Department Office on Counterterrorism used a different section of the same code used above to say "the term 'terrorism' means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience (Title 22 A.S.C.)."[80]

No matter the definition, terrorism at the very least can be identified as an act that involves violence or threats towards a group of people or an individual that is carried out for religious or political reasons. Terrorism is a more modern term although the concept has been around for centuries. We are not able to date the beginning of terrorism but we know that it

[77] Michael Kronenwetter, *Terrorism: A Guide to Events and Documents* (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 2-4.
[78] Caleb Carr, *The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare Against Civilians: Why It Has Always Failed and Why It Will Fail Again* (n.p., 2002), 1 as quoted in Kronenwetter, Michael, *Terrorism: A Guide to Events and Documents* (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 5.
[79] Kronenwetter, *Terrorism*, 5.
[80] Ibid, 5.

existed as early as the 1100's.[81] Over the last nine hundred and eight years at the very least then terrorism has existed and plagued hundreds of countries and thousands of people. The Gunpowder plot is, by any of the definitions listed above, a terrorist act and those who perpetrated were terrorists. What we define as terrorism today, even if we cannot agree on an exact definition, is not how people of the past would have defined the event. To understand these events, in this case the Gunpowder Plot, we need to look at how people saw the event and what language they used to describe the event to put it into modern context.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The Gunpowder Plot left its mark on history as a plot that never took place. From the Gunpowder Plot we are able to get an understanding of how people viewed events and what language they used to describe the events. Although we live in a different time the way we view events and the language we use to describe them are also important. By putting the two views, past and present, together we are better able to understand how we view history and the events that took place. The Gunpowder Plot was condemned by the letters and accounts written as a horrifying event that even in its failure affected England and its history. Although in the past they used different language to describe the event, people in the past and present see the event the same. In the past the plot was treason, a crime worse than any other because of the many

[81] Arnold and Kennedy, *Terrorism,* 33.

innocent lived it would have taken. In the present time the label we put on it is terrorism because we agree that the event was a horrible crime that would have taken so many innocent lives.

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A True and perfect relation of the proceedings against the late most barbarous traitors, Garnet a Iesuite, and his confederats contayning sundry speeches deliuered by the Lords Commissioners at their arraignments for the better satisfaction of those who were hearers, as occasion was offered: the Earle of Northamptons speech having been enlarged upon grounds which are set down: and lastly all that passes at Garnets execution., Imprinted at London, Robert Barker, printer to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, 1606, p 1-416. Early English Books Online, copy from British Library.

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